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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
ASSISTANT SECRETARY

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TO: The Secretary

July 18, 1961

THROUGH: S/S

FROM: IO - Harlan Cleveland

SUBJECT: Berlin and the United Nations.

The main purpose of this packet of papers is to outline the steps that might be taken in the United Nations to advance our policies in the Berlin crisis which Khrushchev says is imminent.

These suggestions are made against the background of the remarkable file of lucid analyses which I found on my desk when I returned from Europe last week. The stimulating variety in emphasis, purpose, and policy which these papers reflect make it necessary to introduce our United Nations proposals with some more general remarks on the assumed United States policies to which they relate. (If you would prefer to read just what I was asked to submit, skip immediately to Tab A.)

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From public discussion of the growing concern over Berlin, and even from comments in the first Department meetings I attended after my return from Europe, I gained the impression that there existed a hard-nosed school of thought which wanted to (a) declare a national emergency, (b) ask for \$4-5 billion extra military money forthwith, and (c) call up some categories of reserves. I find references to these possibilities in an informal record of NSC discussion, but not in the interim memorandum by Mr. Acheson or (in terms of positive argumentation) anywhere else in the documentation available to me.

What the reader of this impressive backlog does find is a very large ration of truth in Mr. Acheson's basic analytical paper. It is clear -- much clearer in his lucid prose -- that the effectiveness of all intermediate measures on Berlin, and their calm, unemotional, and forceful application as circumstances warrant, crucially depend on a decision from the outset to go the distance if necessary in resisting Soviet encroachment on basic Allied rights in Berlin.

In a backhanded way, the earlier history of the Laction affair does after all tend to prove the point: We had (you expressed it eloquently in Bangkok and elsewhere) the conviction that SEATO intervention might in fact be undertaken. The Bloc did not neglect to press its local military advantage as far as possible, but it pushed its luck only so far, and not too much at a time, gauging well our probable boiling point and stopping short of an all-out effort to eliminate the RIG forces -- which it may very

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very well have had the capability to accomplish in the absence of SEATO reinforcement. In view of the unfavorable military and political wicket which the President inherited, it was certainly right for the President not to "go the distance" in Laos at this stage. But the initial commitments were sufficiently strong and sufficiently unequivocal so that they were not only believable but believed. They were believed not because they were an astute and elaborate bluff, but because you and the President believed you would trigger the SEATO force if the Soviets pushed too far and too fast. I think you would have done so, but my guess is hardly relevant; the point is that the Soviets clearly thought so, and decided to have a round of negotiations instead. It was a good decision from their point of view: both the military situation and the political combination of forces were favorable to a good subversive outcome. But they do not have unlimited room for maneuver even now; to some significant extent the SEATO deterrent is still, as the saying goes, credible

In Berlin it is also necessary to make the deterrent credible, and the overwhelming contribution the Acheson paper makes is its emphasis on the principle that it will not be credible unless it is real. If it is real it is self-advertising; the lower the key, the grimmer the sense of basic resolve that snows through on the surface of events. I would therefore argue that, in addition to all the international political arguments for low-key treatment of real increases in our capability to respond to Berlin and to the global Soviet threat, low-key treatment actually increases the credibility of the deterrent itself. If, to the sober and rational war-gamers in the Kremlin, we do not seem to be flailing about extravagantly and prematurely, we present the greater danger to them that if necessary we might actually nit them somewhere, hard.

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I find in the documentation some comments which imply that political negotiation and military preparations are contrasting alternatives. Mr. Acheson's point is, however, precisely that a reasonable political negotiation from our point of view has to be rooted (to use his terminology of a decade ago) in a position of strength. If you are going to negotiate, you need the preparations to show you are serious -- indeed, you need them in order to be serious.

What Mr. Acheson does not bring out clearly is the obverse: If you make significant military preparations (necessarily public in our political system), you equally need to negotiate to demonstrate that you are not spoiling for a war. In fact if you do not start the negotiations, you will be dragged into talks by the pressure of that very widespread and influential opinion which comes to bear on any Power that presumes to prepare for war without being willing to talk at convincing length every step of the way towards war.

So military preparations and political actions are part of the same foreign policy, not alternative foreign policies. The presence of military moves in the package does not make it "an unconditional surrender policy" or an "all-or-nothing" policy. Participation in boring, interminable talks does not make the diplomats soft on Communism. Both are parts of a national security policy. In isolation from each other, neither talking nor military preparations constitute a policy at all.

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The papers before us do not in my judgment sufficiently emphasize how extraordinarily bad is Khrushchev's wicket. It is true that the logistic factors are largely on his side, especially if we assume that the escalation of military challenge and response would never actually get beyond conventional warfare. But hardly anything else about the Berlin situation is tipped toward his side of the coming test of skill and strength: (a) East Germany is bleeding to death, through an open wound the Soviets have not, in fifteen years, found a way to close. The longer this "reunification of Germany by migration" goes on unchecked, the more miserable and desperate Khrushchev's least dependable satellite is likely to become. Given a continuation of the status quo, time is certainly on our side. No wonder he keeps wanting to upset it. (b) The legal rights of the Allies in Berlin, while not without blemish, are very solid on the main points at issue: access to West Berlin, and the illegality of unilateral changes introduced by one Power in a situation set up by Four Power agreement. (c) The economic success of West Germany is phenomenal, and its growing integration with the rest of Western Europe gives the Allies less and less incentive to make deals that are essentially anti-Germany. (d) In appeals to world opinion, Khrushchev has to buck two rooted prejudices of the uninvolved countries which make up most of the United Nations' membership: they would give anything for the big powers not to fight, and they are inclined to be influenced by the self-determination slogan. The first of these predilections favors the status quo as against efforts to upset it. The second means that any substantive discussion in the United Nations can be focussed on the Soviet part of Germany rather than the free part. Our suggestions about United Nations action flow directly from this observation.

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Soviet purposes are described in the papers before us as some combination of these: to formalize the division of Germany, to consolidate the Soviet hold on Eastern Europe, to absorb Berlin into the Bloc, to weaken NATO, and to strike a damaging blow against United States leadership and prestige. I would add two more, though I would not know how to weight them: (a) To extract themselves from a situation that is bad, and getting worse by the day (as above). (b) To jar us loose from constructive activity elsewhere in the world.

In recent years the Bloc has with a good deal of consistency turned on one crisis at a time, to preoccupy our political leadership and discourage free world initiatives. The Korean affair, which did not turn out too well from the Bloc point of view in other respects, was impressively successful as a device for causing us to jettison some dangerously attractive policies (the Marshall Plan and Point Four) in favor of aid programs wrapped in the legitimizing garb of Mutual Security and Defense Support. Already a couple of times during the past decade, Berlin has served a similar purpose. It is dealing with Quemoy and Matsü and political probes in the Middle East. They have normally turned on one major trouble at a time, presumably on the tenable theory that US foreign policy

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policy has been peculiarly susceptible to dealing, "flat out," with one crisis at a time.

This Berlin crisis could have the effect of de-emphasizing the social and economic aid efforts, of slowing moves toward European integration and a closer-knit Atlantic Community (because of uncertainties about Germany), and of polarizing the Cold War, thus reducing the effectiveness of our drive to find common political ground with the less-developed areas. There are evidences of this "Berlin effect" already in our own politics, in the cries for toughness on Berlin and an abandonment of frills like patient negotiation with adversaries and foreign aid to neutrals. If the "Berlin effect" is pervasive, the Soviets could derive a major benefit from this year's flap even if they fail to change in any significant way the state of affairs in Berlin. For example, if as a result of our preoccupation on Berlin we decide not to do what we have been doing with the Portuguese regarding Angola we will have given to the USSR the opportunity to call the tune in this area to the advantage of the US and the free world.

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The military buildup is being discussed in the context of Khrushchev's threats to change the status of Berlin. The context will tempt the Administration to use the threat to Berlin as the primary justification even for broader military preparations to meet more effectively the global Soviet challenge in its many facets. The danger here is obvious, but probably worth a reminder: A buildup based too narrowly on threats in the German sector of our world-wide confrontation is vulnerable to a Soviet decision to smile sweetly through the Brandenburg Gate for long enough to invalidate the main reason given for the buildup. The long-range measures should be related to the global threat; they might best be frankly justified on that basis.

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These random reactions to the problem as a whole are certainly cools to your Newcastle. But even reminders and reinforcements of your own thinking are sometimes useful contributions from a staff. In any case, nothing is lost since I did not write this on company time.

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